

THESIS

GONE FISHIN'

Submitted by
Hiroko Aoyama
Art Department

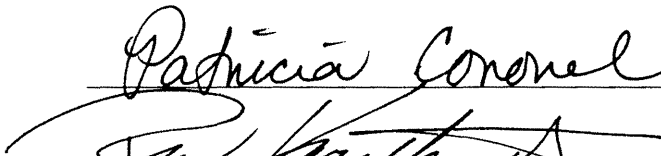
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado
Summer 1998

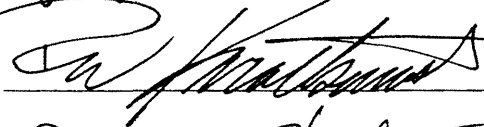
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

May 7, 1998

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY HIROKO AOYAMA ENTITLED GONE FISHIN' BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

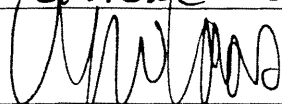
Committee on Graduate Work

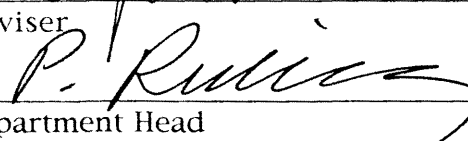




Robert J. Theodoratus

Thomas R. Lundberg



Adviser


Department Head

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

GONE FISHIN'

The characteristics of the art I create are strongly influenced by two strikingly different cultures of East and West. I was born, raised, and educated in Japan, but more than thirty years of my life have been spent in the United States. Hence, my work may reveal certain qualities that appear simultaneously both familiar and exotic to the viewers. My motive for developing such art is to purposely create visual tensions between the familiar and the exotic within the context of the multiculturalism. In addition, my works are intended to manifest a multitude of subtle ambiguities about their meanings so as to enable viewers to exercise their imagination and create their own dialogue with the sculpture.

Hiroko Aoyama
Art Department
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523
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Thank you, Sue Mohr of Art Department, for skillfully editing my thesis.

Big thanks to my children, Edwin and Clare, who have given me motivation and confidence, since they promised to purchase my works of art at above market prices in the future.

Above all, I must thank my husband, Terutomo, for his patience, generosity, and creative suggestions. I could not have come this far without him.

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The year 1995 marked the twentieth anniversary of my father's death. The year also coincided with the commencement of my career as a sculptor within the graduate art program at Colorado State University. My MFA thesis sculpture is meant to commemorate these two significant events. Moreover, my thesis is dedicated to my mother who is at the pinnacle of her wisdom and artistic creativity at age 84. She is still healthy, both mentally as well as physically, but she and I are keenly conscious of the limited span of human life.

When I was a youngster in Japan, my mother used to teach me how to compose *haiku* poems. Some of them I submitted to competitions and they won awards, thanks to my mother's skillful editing. Since then, I have always believed that she was an outstanding poet. She did not, however, write any *haiku* poems seriously until about five years ago. Today, her verses receive top honors at numerous national competitions. The following is one of her poems composed in 1995:

| | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>Saka agari</i> | Back-flips on a horizontal bar, |
| <i>Dekite kootei</i> | What a triumph on a playground, |
| <i>Hana fubuki</i> | Cherry blossom confetti. |

What inspired my mother was the following event. In one glorious afternoon in spring, she happened to be walking by an elementary school playground near her home. The sun was shining in a golden glow, and the cherry blossoms were at their peak. As she was passing by, she noticed two little girls, seven or eight years of age and seemingly novice gymnasts,

practicing gymnastic back-flips on the horizontal bars. They were working so hard at it that she could not help but to watch them in hopes that they would succeed. After their countless tries, the girls finally did prevail. At the moment of their triumph, my mother observed a remarkable natural phenomenon--the girls were showered with the petals of cherry blossoms that were apparently blown by a sudden gentle wind as if to celebrate the girls' glorious moment. With broad smiles on their faces, the little girls left the playground, skipping towards their homes. My mother, moved by this simple yet joyful beauty, wrote the above poem capturing that fleeting moment.

Historically, two kinds of blossoms, the cherry and the plum, have been the most widely revered flowers in Japanese art. Makoto Ooka, a distinguished modern Japanese poet, explains that a central characteristic of many *haiku* is the depiction of blossoms at the height of radiance, understood through the moment of their fall. The underlining concept is that flowers bloom only for the sake of falling, thus reflecting the Japanese philosophy of the paradox of life. Ooka further asserts:

"... the poets merge their identities with the falling flowers and fade into the passage of time. Somehow they see beauty in transience, (and) glory in the flower at the moment of fall. The idea seems to be that in the beauty of the moment, when we have lived out our limited span, we can see a glorious vision of the beyond." ¹

Thus, my mother's poem reveals certain essences that are the crucial prescriptions for composing a *haiku*. For example, her verse is the

¹Ooka, Makoto. The Colors of Poetry: Essay in Classic Japanese Verse. Rochester, MI.: Katydid Books. 1991. p. 94.

manifestation of an abstract impression of the fleeting moment. It conveys the eternal and transient aspects of human existence in nature. Above all, the verse is constructed with the minimalist's idea of capturing only the substance with a few images and expressing it in the strict limit of seventeen syllables. It leaves the rest to the readers to contemplate in their imaginations, so that it invites intellectual and emotional participation.

My artworks, I believe, share the same essences that are vital for my mother to compose *haiku*, although they are presented in visual language, and do not follow the strict prescriptive rules which her works do. For example, my art conveys the eternal and transient aspects of human existence. While each of my mother's verses manifests an impression of a fleeting moment in life, such as the observation of the children's triumphant moment and of the cherry blossoms at the their fall, my works express an awareness of the dual components of human existence: the momentary (the biological aspect) and the eternal (the metaphysical aspect). In other words, we all know as a matter of fact that sooner or later, every one of us will die. Yet, many of us, myself included, believe in a supernatural way that our souls will transcend and live eternally even though our bodies will cease to exist in the physical world. In some of my works the viewers can, perhaps, discern the aspects of death and dying and some ritual qualities associated with death. These elements imply my sentiment towards the reality that my mother will eventually depart from our physical realm just as my father did twenty-three years ago.

The majority of my sculptures are minimalist, and my idea of minimalism parallels that of composing *haiku* verses. My mother selects each word carefully for composition so that each syllable in her poem becomes essential and irreplaceable. Similarly, the forms I create are pared down to

the essentials devoid of embellishment so that they provide viewers with more "freedom" to contemplate the work.

Furthermore, in my projects the materials and forms maintain an inseparable relationship. I select each material carefully in hopes that the forms achieve the maximum depth of meaning. The materials are to me like the words in the poems--they hold the power of communication with the viewers. The materials selected not only allude to such human conditions as living, dying and the beyond, but also imply such states of mind as exultation, empathy, sorrow, and humility. As Gaston Bachelard, a philosopher of science, puts it, "All forms summon the materials, and conversely, quite apart from simple formal tricks, every material that is seen, named or handled is rich in values and images."²

Transforming my ideas into visual art, I first research and adopt basic geometric shapes such as rectangles, squares, cylinders and cones, which are universally found in temple architecture and burial grounds. I then select suitable materials diverse in metaphor yet common in daily life. For example, my sculpture titled Gone Fishin' is composed of rectangles and cylinders. The materials are a raw fish, sea salt, beeswax and plaster of Paris. Two basic components, a large table and a shallow box, form the sculpture. The table is constructed of a simple rectangular top and four columnar legs and cast in plaster of Paris. This table supports a large oblong beeswax container. Inside the container lies a decaying fish on a bed of sea salt.

This work relates to funerary sculpture and architecture. Simultaneously, these combined elements are referential to a dinner table.

² Vanlaethem, France. Gaetano Pesce. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc. 1989. p. 34.

The dichotomy between a decaying fish and honey scented beeswax which accompany the sculpture creates a tension between mundane and sacred.

My motive for developing these artworks is to purposely produce a discord between the familiar and the exotic. In addition, my works are intended to manifest a multitude of subtle ambiguities about their meanings so as to enable spectators to exercise their imagination and create their own dialogue with the sculpture.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ooka, Makoto. The colors of Poetry: Essay in Classic Japanese Verse. Rochester, MI.: Katydid Books. 1991. p. 94.

Vanlaethem, France. Gaetano Pesce. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc. 1989. p. 34.

PLATE #1

Title: To My Father.

Date: 1996.

Medium: Paraffin wax, Indiana limestone, aspen wood.

Dimensions: 64"L x 23"W x 36"H.

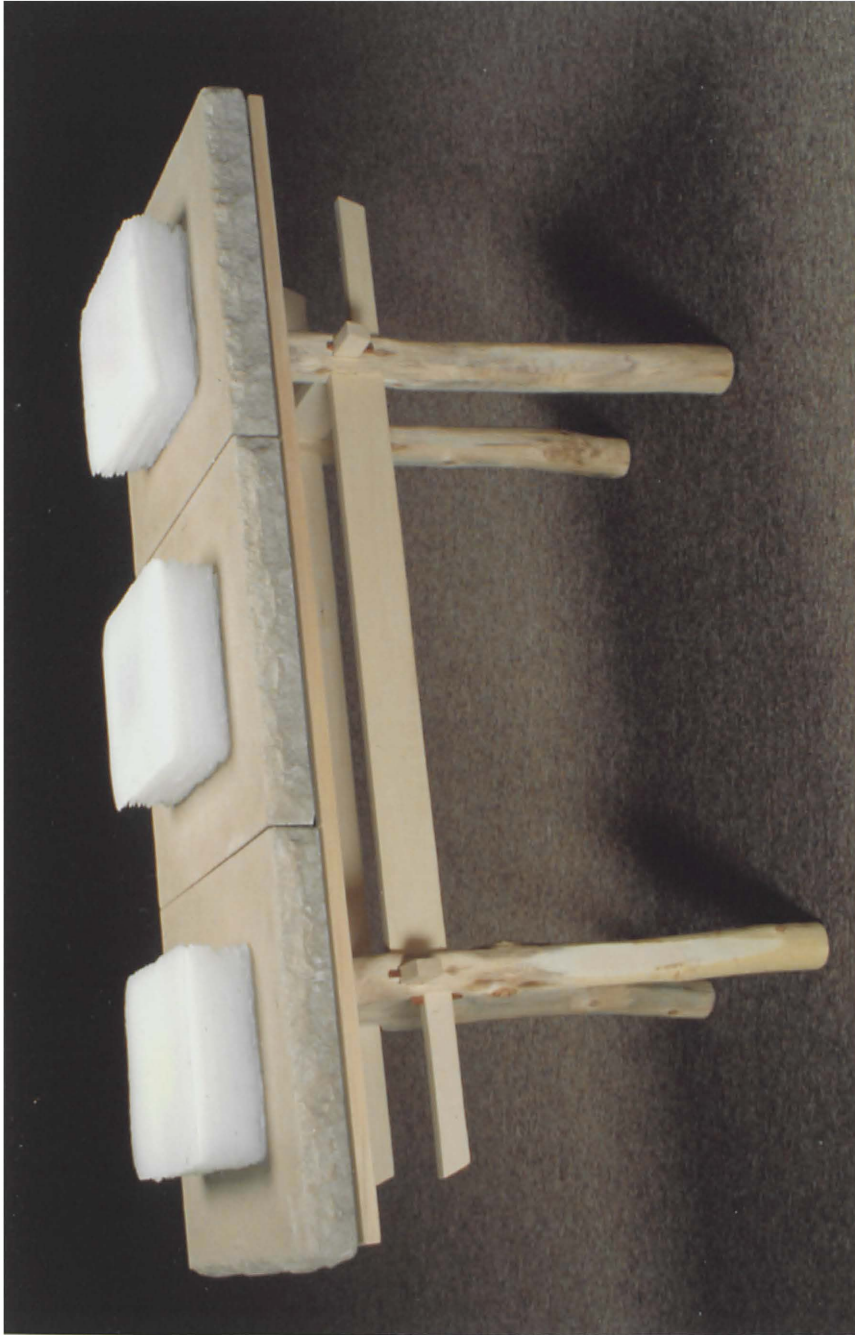


PLATE #2

Title: Gone Fishin'.

Date: 1998.

Medium: Raw fish, sea salt, beeswax, plaster.

Dimensions: 72"L x 32"W x 30"H.



PLATE #3

Title: Untitled.

Date: 1997-98.

Medium: Moths, maple wood, glass.

Dimensions: 72"L x 5"W x 3-1/2"H.



PLATE #4

Group photo of my sculptures as they were exhibited
at the Thesis Show:

Foreground: Sculpture titled To My Father, 1996.

Center: Sculpture titled Gone Fishin', 1998.

Background: Sculpture Untitled, 1997-98.

